

Message Text

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ORIGIN SS-15

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CCO-00 SSO-00 /016 R

66011

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APPROVED BY S/S-O:TGMARTIN

-----072406 190450Z /16

O 190404Z APR 78 ZFF4

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO USDEL SECRETARY IMMEDIATE

UNCLAS STATE 099988 TOSEC 040143

FOLLOWING REPEAT PANAMA 2682 ACTION SECSTATE INFO PANCANAL
USCINCSO APR 19.

QUOTE: UNCLAS PANAMA 2682

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PEPR, PN

SUBJECT: TORRIJOS PRESS CONFERENCE

REF: PANAMA 2681

1. IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING HIS ADDRESS TO THE NATION,
GEN. TORRIJOS APPEARED AT A PRESS CONFERENCE AT THE
PANAMA CITY HOLIDAY INN; PRESS CONFERENCE WAS CARRIED
ON SAME NATIONWIDE RADIO AND TV NETWORK AS ADDRESS.

2. RESPONDING TO A QUESTION ABOUT A SECOND PLEBISCITE,
TORRIJOS SAID HIS GOVERNMENT WAS NOT THINKING ABOUT A
PLEBISCITE, BUT RATHER ABOUT WHETHER THE TREATIES AS
APPROVED BY THE SENATE WOULD BE ACCEPTABLE TO PANAMA
OR NOT. THEY WERE ACCEPTABLE, AND PANAMA ACCEPTED THEM.

3. ASKED TO CLARIFY THE REMARK IN HIS ADDRESS THAT HAD
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THE SENATE NOT APPROVED THE TREATIES, TOMORROW WOULD
HAVE BEGUN ANOTHER ROAD TO LIBERATION, TORRIJOS STATED
THAT THE DECISION HAD ALREADY BEEN CAREFULLY WEIGHED
AND TAKEN BY THE PANAMANIAN ARMED FORCES THAT IF SENATE
APPROVAL WAS DENIED, PANAMA WOULD NEGOTIATE NO LONGER.
THE ARMED FORCES WOULD THEN HAVE LED A STRUGGLE FOR
NATIONAL LIBERATION.

4. CLARIFYING REMARK IN ADDRESS REGARDING PANAMA'S ROLE IN DEFENDING THE CANAL, TORRIJOS SAID ONE MUST RECALL THAT, DESPITE ANYTHING ANY OTHER COUNTRY MIGHT DO, THE NATIONAL GUARD HAD THE POWER TO DESTROY THE CANAL. BY NOT DESTROYING IT, THERE WERE IPSO FACTO INSTRUMENTAL AND OPERATIVE ACTORS IN ITS DEFENSE.

5. ONE CORRESPONDENT ASKED HOW THE UNITED STATES COULD INTERVENE IN PANAMA TO PROTECT THE NEUTRALITY OF THE CANAL WITHOUT INTERVENING IN THE INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF PANAMA. TORRIJOS RESPONDED THAT THIS WAS BY DEFINITION IMPOSSIBLE; IF THE UNITED STATES SHOULD SEEK TO INTERVENE AGAINST PANAMA'S WILL OR WITHOUT ITS CONSENT, THE NATIONAL GUARD COULD DESTROY THE CANAL AND THERE WAS NO SUCH THING AS PROTECTING THE NEUTRALITY OF A DESTROYED CANAL. CONTINUING IN THE SAME VEIN, HE TOLD ANOTHER QUESTIONER THAT HE HAD NEVER INTENDED TO BECOME THE LEADER WHO SIGNED SOMETHING THAT WOULD JUSTIFY THE FIRST INTERVENTION IN PANAMA IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY--AND HE HAD NOT DONE SO. A MAJORITY IN THE SENATE, HE FELT, HAD SEEN AND ACKNOWLEDGED PANAMA'S REALITY. THE MINORITY HAD PLACED THE CANAL WITHIN TWO VOTES OF BEING DESTROYED. IT WAS IMMATERIAL THAT THE DECONCINI AMENDMENT APPLIED TO THE PERMANENT NEUTRALITY TREATY WHILE THE LEADERSHIP MODIFICATION OF UNCLASSIFIED

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IT RELATED TO THE CANAL TREATY. THE FACT WAS THAT THE FORCES OF THE UNITED STATES WERE FOUR TO SIX HOURS AWAY FROM PANAMA, AND IF THEY SOUGHT TO INTERVENE AFTER 2000, THEY COULD ONLY INTERVENE TO FIND A DESTROYED CANAL. JORDEN UNQUOTE CHRISTOPHER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: TREATY RATIFICATION, TOSEC, PRESS CONFERENCES, UPPER HOUSE
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 19 apr 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
Disposition Date: 01 jan 1960
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978STATE099988
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: O:TGMARTIN
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780167-0090
Format: TEL
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780439/aaaabgtf.tel
Line Count: 99
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 194b01ab-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ORIGIN SS
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 PANAMA 2681
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 29 mar 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: N/A
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2913812
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: TORRIJOS PRESS CONFERENCE
TAGS: PINT, PEPR, SOPN, PN, US, (TORRIJOS HERRERA, OMAR)
To: SECRETARY
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/194b01ab-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014